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# *The Jesuits and Joe McCarthy*

DONALD F. CROSBY, S.J.

The Jesuits frequently attract public attention, and one such occasion for notoriety occurred in the days of the Communist hunt commonly associated with the name of the junior Senator from Wisconsin, Joseph Raymond McCarthy (1908-1957). During the years from 1950 to 1957 there were repeated attempts to link McCarthy with the Jesuits, (or, paradoxically, to link him with the Senator's opponents). The national Jesuit weekly *America* became embroiled in one of the most bitter arguments which broke out in the controversy. The events illustrate not only the intensely divisive nature of the dispute over McCarthy, but the peculiar position of the order both in the Church and in the intellectual life of the nation as well.

The Jesuits and McCarthy first met at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Following a strict Catholic upbringing in northern Wisconsin, young McCarthy entered the Jesuit university in the fall of 1930, registering in the engineering college. Changing later to law, he carved a wide path through Marquette, making a name for himself as a "big man on campus." The Jesuit Fathers at Marquette with memories of McCarthy describe him as fun-loving, possessed of a winning personality, faithful to his religious duties, and always deferential toward the clergy. They also remember that he was beginning to develop an "Irish wit" that tempered his personality.<sup>1</sup> His stay in the law school was neither distinguished nor poor, and he graduated on schedule in 1935, soon gaining admission to the Wisconsin bar.

Viewed in retrospect, his Marquette experience appears to be less an exercise in formation at the hands of the Jesuits than simply a stop on the way up the ladder to political success. Marquette University gave him the legal background he needed to advance in politics, but he does not seem to have undergone any kind of transformation as a result of his years there. As a student in the law school, he certainly would have learned the Church's position on Communism, but it seems to have made little impression on him. In sum, the Marquette Jesuits seem to have had little impact on either McCarthy's character, or his system of values.

1. Interviews with Rev. James Orford, S.J., November 15, 1971; Rev. Robert Sampon, November 17, 1971; Rev. Raphael Hamilton, S.J., November 16, 1971; Rev. Perry Roetz, S.J., November 13, 1971.

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McCarthy and the sons of Loyola would have little to do with each other for the next fifteen years, as he began his turbulent career. He started as an up-country lawyer, soon afterwards becoming an energetic (and highly controversial) judge, and when World War II broke out, he joined the Marines and fought in the South Pacific. The War over, he won election to the Senate in 1946, becoming the junior Senator from Wisconsin.

What happened next has become a standard chapter in the McCarthy legend, and since it involves the Jesuits, is of great interest here. The story goes that following a completely unremarkable three years in the Senate, McCarthy found himself in 1950 desperately in need of a winning issue. At precisely the right moment, Edmund Walsh, a Jesuit priest from Georgetown University, intervened and convinced him that the Communists-in-government issue was the one for him. The conventional wisdom has it that on January 7, 1950, McCarthy met for dinner with Walsh and two others. When he told his dinner companions that he needed an "issue" to win re-election in 1952, Walsh told him to try the Communists-in-government topic, since it was a guaranteed political platform. McCarthy jumped at the idea, and he was off immediately on his famous Communist hunt. The story began with Drew Pearson's newspaper column and received embellishment from Jack Anderson and Ronald May in their popular biography of the Senator. It has since become a permanent fixture of the McCarthy legend, enduring to the present.<sup>2</sup>

The incident has an apparent plausibility. It made sense, after all, to say that a Jesuit priest had started McCarthy on his career as the paradigmatic anti-Communist because the Jesuits had educated him at Marquette, and Catholic priests were known to have a special argument with Communism. Unfortunately, the story's foundations are extremely shaky. First, Walsh bitterly denied having given McCarthy any ideas at all about Communism, and even challenged Pearson to prove his claim. Unfortunately, Walsh failed to make his objections public, probably because he wanted to avoid "getting into the gutter" with Pearson. Second, it was entirely out of character for Walsh to engage in public polemics about domestic Communism, since his political interests centered exclusively on the issue of international Communism. Third, neither Pearson, Anderson and May, nor anyone else has produced documentary evidence to support the story. (The Walsh papers are silent

2. Pearson column in *Washington Post*, March 14, 1950; Jack Anderson and Ronald May, *McCarthy, the Man, the Senator, the Ism* (Boston, 1953), pp. 172-173; Richard Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York, 1959), pp. 122-123; Eric Goldman, *The Crucial Decade* (New York, 1959), pp. 139-140; Fred Cook, *The Nightmare Decade* (New York, 1971), pp. 139-141; David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972), pp. 117-118.

on the matter.) Fourth, McCarthy actually began using the subversion issue some two months *before* the Colony dinner.<sup>3</sup>

Since all of the participants in the event are either dead or unavailable for comment, it is impossible to acquire firsthand information about it. It is obvious, however, that the tale is extremely suspect, and future historians would do well to consign it the oblivion it has long deserved.

With or without the help of Edmund Walsh, Joseph Raymond McCarthy was soon off and running. On February 9, 1950, he told the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia, "I have here in my hand a list of 205—a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department." A whirlwind of publicity greeted this pronouncement, beginning a flurry of headlines that would last for almost five years. The debates and oral violence that surrounded McCarthy have received abundant documentation, as has the divisive nature of its impact on the American Catholic community.<sup>4</sup> What about the Jesuits and McCarthy? Few of them chose to speak openly about America's newest and most sensational Communist-hunter, though the national Jesuit weekly *America* ventured an occasional mild criticism of the Senator's early forays. It concluded that McCarthy's charges of Communists in the State Department were "pretty irresponsible," yet the "ruinous collapse" of the nation's China policy more than warranted a careful investigation of the agency.<sup>5</sup> McCarthy himself, however, did not warrant a careful investigation, at least in the view of *America*. In the two years that followed, years marked by some of the most intense political warfare in American history, the magazine stood mostly aloof, occasionally criticizing McCarthy's sallies against Democrats and liberals, but more often avoiding the issue.<sup>6</sup>

3. Walsh's Jesuit confidants who insist that he denied Pearson's claim were: Rev. Louis Gallagher (letter of October 19, 1971, to author); Rev. Daniel Power (interviewed February 4, 1972); Rev. Brian McGrath (interviewed Feb. 8, 1972); Walsh Papers, Georgetown University; on McCarthy's earlier use of the subversion issue, see Michael O'Brien, "Senator Joseph McCarthy and Wisconsin," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), p. 97.

4. For an exhaustive study of the speech, see Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear* (Lexington, Ky., 1970), pp. 48-51; Michael P. Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 238-39; David Oshinsky, "Senator Joseph McCarthy and the American Labor Movement," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1971), pp. 253-257, 263; Donald F. Crosby, "The Angry Catholics: American Catholics and Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, 1950-1957," (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1973).

5. "Senator McCarthy's Charges," *America*, April 1, 1950, p. 737. See also, "... and the Search for Truth," *America*, April 1, 1950, p. 737; "... And the Power to Investigate," *America*, April 8, 1950, p. 3; "Is the Red Peril a Distraction?" *America*, May 27, 1950, p. 235.

6. See, for instance, "The Battle of the Files," *America*, April 22, 1950, pp. 78-79; "Communists in Washington," *America*, July 21, 1951, p. 391; "Wedemeyer Versus McCarthy," *America*, June 30, 1951, p. 323; "Benton-McCarthy Showdown?" *America*, March 22, 1952, p. 660.

*America's* definitive break with the junior Senator did not come until the Presidential campaign of 1952. What prompted *America's* sudden move was McCarthy's violent attack of October 27, 1952, against the Democratic candidate for President, Adlai Stevenson. Speaking before a nationwide television audience, McCarthy insinuated that Stevenson had betrayed his country, just as Alger Hiss had done some years before. To the delight of his partisan listeners, McCarthy referred slyly to "Alger, I mean Adlai, Stevenson." McCarthy's slippery tactic naturally angered Democrats and liberals everywhere, but none more so than the liberally-minded editor of *America*, Father Robert Hartnett. Long an admirer of the Democratic party's social reform programs, Hartnett had supported both the Truman Administration's Fair Deal legislation and Stevenson's bid for the White House. An ardent Stevensonite with a high-minded view of political ethics, Hartnett bristled at McCarthy's abrasive slur. Hartnett became especially incensed when McCarthy waved a photostatic copy of the Communist *Daily Worker* before his audience, saying that the *Worker* had endorsed Stevenson's candidacy for the Presidency. After a delay of several weeks during which he painstakingly gathered together the copies of the *Worker* that he needed, Hartnett published a broadside against McCarthy. With his copy of the *Worker* for October 19 lying before him, Hartnett wrote, "Now this writer holds in his hands, not a photostat but the actual complete copy of the *Daily Worker* for October 19. It says just the opposite of what McCarthy claimed it says . . . Governor Stevenson is not even mentioned in this editorial." McCarthy's "cheap stunt" with the *Worker* was a good example of "what are euphemistically called McCarthy's 'methods,'" wrote Hartnett. Nothing could have been less convincing than McCarthy's photostats, because he made off with them immediately after the address, in spite of "ostentatiously promising" during the speech to let the reporters examine them as soon as he had finished speaking.<sup>7</sup>

McCarthy quickly replied to Hartnett's attack. In a long letter to the editor, he accused Hartnett of carrying a "completely and viciously false" article about his Chicago speech. The *Worker* editorial did indeed urge its readers to vote for Stevenson, McCarthy said, and it was simply not true that he had vanished with the documents after completing the speech. The burden of McCarthy's letter was not what he had said in the address, however, but how he felt about the Jesuits at *America*. Wrote the Senator:

I realize that your magazine has been extremely critical of my fight to expose Communists in government. Obviously that is your right. I am sure you will agree with me, however, that while you may owe no duty to me to correct the vicious smear job which you attempted to do on me, you do owe a

7. Robert Hartnett, "Pattern of GOP Victory," *America*, November 22, 1952, p. 209. For McCarthy speech, see *New York Times*, October 28, 1954, pp. 1, 26, 30.

heavy duty to the vast number of good Catholic people who assume that at least in a Jesuit operated magazine they can read the truth.

Being an ardent Catholic myself, brought up with a great respect for the Priesthood, which I still hold, it is inconceivable to me that a Catholic Priest could indulge in such vicious falsehoods in order to discredit my fight to expose the greatest enemy of not only the Catholic Church, but our entire civilization.

If you do not see fit to correct the falsehoods in this article, then it would seem that common decency would demand that you publish not only the letter but also the *Daily Worker* editorial to which I referred at Chicago so that your readers may determine the truth.<sup>8</sup>

McCarthy's riposte failed to impress Hartnett. He immediately published McCarthy's long letter, as well as the disputed article from the *Worker*. Once again he plowed through the pages of the *Worker*, attempting to see if McCarthy's interpretation of it had any validity at all. He found, first of all, that McCarthy had confused different editions of the *Worker* for October 19, and in doing so had mixed up an editorial on Stevenson with an article on the same man. Far more serious, however, was Hartnett's pained discovery that the *Worker* for that date had positively disavowed Stevenson's candidacy, saying that he was as unacceptable a nominee for President as was Dwight Eisenhower. Lest McCarthy fail to get the point, the *Worker* on October 29 attacked him for saying that it had ever approved of a "slick warmonger like Stevenson." Hartnett concluded that the McCarthy version of what the *Daily Worker* had said was a "badly garbled and distorted account" of what really appeared in the newspaper.<sup>9</sup>

In the weeks that followed, Hartnett continued to attack McCarthy, calling his Stevenson address a "tissue of innuendoes."<sup>10</sup> McCarthy responded by reasserting his earlier claim that he was "an ardent Catholic" whose "very religious mother" had implanted in him "a deep and abiding respect for the priesthood." What could he say, now that those very Jesuits whose "religious zeal, high intelligence and complete integrity" he had come to know at Marquette University, were actually obstructing the fight against "atheistic Communism?"<sup>11</sup>

Unhappy with Hartnett's continued recalcitrance, McCarthy wrote to Hartnett's Jesuit superior in New York City, Father John McMahon. McMahon answered McCarthy politely, saying only that he had read the Senator's letter "with interest."<sup>12</sup> The McCarthy-McMahon correspon-

8. McCarthy to Hartnett, in *America*, December 13, 1952, p. 316.

9. Robert Hartnett, "Daily Worker on Stevenson," *America*, December 13, 1952, pp. 302-303.

10. Hartnett, "Documents and Innuendoes," *America*, December 20, 1952, pp. 327-328. See also, "Detecting Subversives," *America*, January 3, 1953, p. 370.

11. McCarthy to Hartnett, January 6, 1953. Stencilled copy in "McCarthy" file, Patrick McCarran Papers, College of the Holy Names (Oakland, California).

12. Ray Kiermas [for McCarthy] to John McMahon, January 13, 1953, in "America" file, Jesuit Archives, Fordham University (hereafter cited as JAFU). John McMahon to McCarthy, January 15, 1953, JAFU.

dence is important because it marked the first of a long list of attempts by persons outside the order to force Jesuit superiors to bring pressure on Hartnett. Meanwhile, public reaction to *America's* bout with McCarthy ran clearly in its favor, as the mail and the national press seemed to show.<sup>13</sup>

For Hartnett, the first debate had been a strictly political affair. He had paid no attention at all to McCarthy's repeated and insistent attempts to bring Catholicism into the argument. Looking at the Senator in exclusively political terms, he used the standard Democratic (and liberal) arguments against McCarthy: the Senator had misused his evidence, had imputed statements to the opposition that it had never made, had hinted falsely at insidious connections between liberals and Communists, and had defamed the reputations of honorable men. At the same time, however, Hartnett's personality and background gave a peculiar cast to the liberal thesis he was developing. He had researched the documents of the case with a dogged thoroughness that few editors would have shown, and he pursued McCarthy's false statements and innuendoes with immense rigor, checking even the most minute details. He would prove to be a stubborn and relentless foe of McCarthyism.

In the two years that followed, Hartnett further expanded his argument against McCarthy. He was convinced, first of all, that the problem of domestic Communism was largely a thing of the past, since previous investigations had routed most of the Communists out of the government. Hartnett believed himself exceptionally well informed on this subject, since he had highly-placed friends in Washington. Senator McCarthy, he concluded, was raising a false issue simply to gain publicity and to make a political career for himself. But the McCarthy investigations were not only unnecessary, they were truly harmful as well because they destroyed the democratic processes that Hartnett, as a civil libertarian and a scholar of political science, believed essential to the life of the nation. Thus the casualties in McCarthy's campaign were not the Communists, but rather "our historic procedures of 'due process of law,' our standards of honesty in the discussion of grave political issues," and "respect for public and professional authority."<sup>14</sup> Finally, like the *Commonweal* (as well as the many Catholic Democrats who opposed McCarthy), Hartnett grieved that McCarthy had distracted the public from the all-important social issues, from such problems as unemployment, education, health, and housing.<sup>15</sup>

13. Hartnett to John McMahon, October 28, 1952, "America" File, JAFU; *America*, January 10, 1953, p. 412; *Washington Post*, January 4, 1953.

14. Robert Hartnett, "Congress, Communists and the Common Good," *America*, March 27, 1954, p. 678; see also, "The Image and Echo of the Multitude," *America*, December 19, 1953, p. 311; "Campus Commies," *America*, February 14, 1953, p. 530; "'Fifth Amendment' College Teachers . . . Who Is to Judge?" *America*, January 2, 1954, p. 349.

15. Interview with Robert Hartnett, September 9, 1971.

For Hartnett, as for most Catholic editors of the postwar years, the burning question was the position of the Catholic citizen in American society. How did the American Catholic carve a place for himself in American life that was at once fully American and truly Catholic? For conservative Catholics such as Patrick Scanlan, the right wing editor of the *Brooklyn Tablet*, the answer lay in a return to red-blooded American patriotism, in hewing to a love of country so passionate that none could question it. For Hartnett, the answer was much more complex. Patriotism was good, yes, but what happened to the image of Catholicism when the patriotism it preached became strident, intolerant, conformist? Patriotism made no sense if it violated the "common good," that is, the welfare of all the nation's citizens. Patriotism became a menace if it drowned out the quiet, scholarly investigation of political questions that Hartnett like to conduct in the pages of *America*. Did the American Catholic find his place in American society by supporting the search for subversives in the government? Of course he did, but the Church had a long tradition of teachings both on the problem of Communism and on the nature of the political order as well: the Catholic anti-Communist ought to make this tradition part and parcel of his own thought, Hartnett believed.<sup>16</sup> For Hartnett, therefore, McCarthyism represented the essence of all that was wrong with American Catholicism.

The Eisenhower landslide of 1952 swept the Republican party into the White House and both houses of Congress, carrying Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin with it. The victorious Republicans, anxious to press the charge of "softness on Communism" against the opposition party, gave McCarthy the chairmanship of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, an arm of the Senate Committee on Government Appropriations. Armed with a mandate to smoke out Communists hidden in the federal government, McCarthy pressed his investigations into the Voice of America, the federal government's overseas information programs, and other federal agencies.<sup>17</sup> Though the targets were new, the arguments for and against McCarthy were not: to liberals like Hartnett, McCarthy's "methods" of investigation represented an intolerable assault on civil liberties, while to conservatives like Pat Scanlan he stood out as the only man in the government who was "doing something" about Communism.

McCarthy's quest for Communist spies reached a sensational climax in the first half of 1954, when he attacked the United States Army, accusing it of "coddling Communists" in its ranks. In several editorials discussing the McCarthy committee's work (popularly known as the "TV hearings"), *America* advanced a "constitutional" case against McCarthy, rebuking him for his assault on the rights of the President, his "insulting"

16. Hartnett interview.

17. Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, pp. 212-220.



handling of witnesses, and his cavalier disregard for civil liberties.<sup>18</sup> Those were Hartnett's public worries over McCarthyism. In private he told his superiors that McCarthy had become a "national liability," since he distracted national attention from the real problems the country faced. To his friend Wilfred Parsons (*America's* Washington correspondent), he confided his growing concern over Catholic acceptance of McCarthy.<sup>19</sup>

In late March and April of 1954, *America* softened its McCarthy line slightly. It went out of its way to praise the "wholly admirable" instincts of McCarthy's Catholic adherents, insisting only that the "particular good" of rooting Communists out of the government ought not to interfere with the more important "common good," or the welfare of the whole nation.<sup>20</sup> What *America* said was not soft enough, however, to mollify its Catholic critics, who sent it an avalanche of violent protest mail. "The situation here is undoubtedly becoming awkward," Hartnett worried, noting especially the "emotionalism" of the Catholic McCarthyites.<sup>21</sup>

In mid-April, *America* published most of the mail it had received on McCarthy, and nothing gave a better illustration of the verbal mayhem that had crept into the Catholic argument over the Senator. A priest in upstate New York, for instance, wrote that he was not cancelling his subscription since he had been wise enough not to have one in the first place. Nevertheless, he believed that if enough subscribers dropped the magazine, "it might bring you to your senses. Please accept my prayers for your conversion." A reader in Toledo, Ohio, wrote curiously, "Senator McCarthy is a good Catholic. . . . Look at his enemies: the *Daily Worker*, Tito, and Stevenson—a divorced man and member of the ADA."<sup>22</sup>

Notwithstanding its Catholic critics, *America* still had its supporters among the Catholic faithful. A man in Connecticut wrote that he dreaded the "slowly developing but perceptible undercurrent of public opinion that whispers that the Church approves of Senator McCarthy because he is a Catholic." Others shared his viewpoint and took *America's* side in the dispute.<sup>23</sup>

18. "We Can Do Better Than This," *America*, March 6, 1954, p. 585; Robert Hartnett, "Presidential Leadership vs. Senate Hegemony," *America*, March 13, 1954, pp. 621, 623.

19. Hartnett to the Fathers Provincial, March 15, 1954, "America" file, JAFU. Hartnett to Wilfred Parsons, March 10, 1954, Parsons Papers, Georgetown University (hereafter cited as GU).

20. "Fighting Communism: The Scope of 'Opinion,'" *America*, April 10, 1954, p. 34; Robert Hartnett, "Congress, Communists, and the Common Good," *America*, March 27, 1954, pp. 677-679.

21. Hartnett to Parsons, April 7, 1954, Parsons Papers, GU.

22. "Feature X," *America*, April 17, 1954, p. 71.

23. Joseph T. Prentiss to *America*, in "Feature X," *America*, April 10, 1954, p. 44; "Feature X," *America*, April 17, 1954, p. 70.

*America* might well have been able to ride out the stormy seas of McCarthyism had it not been for a blistering attack that Hartnett administered to McCarthy in the issue of the journal for May 22, 1954. No Catholic essay on McCarthy, either for him or against him, ever attracted as much attention as Hartnett's vigorous editorial, "'Peaceful Overthrow' of the U.S. Presidency." (The occasion of the piece was McCarthy's acceptance of highly classified information from an Army officer, in open defiance of the President's strict prohibition against making such documents public. McCarthy had praised the "courage" of the young officer, much to the consternation of the liberal press and politicians, who now saw McCarthy becoming a menace even to the established legal order).<sup>24</sup> Hartnett's editorial warned of the "grave constitutional issue posed by Senator McCarthy's 'Methods.'" McCarthy's actions seriously threatened the "rule of law" which was the "hallmark of free government," Hartnett wrote. The President was the choice of all the people, and was responsible to all of them. Therefore it was the obligation of the whole country to decide whether the President was properly discharging his duties; McCarthy had no business arrogating the nation's duty to himself. Hartnett feared that McCarthy was bringing about a "peaceful" but nevertheless "piecemeal" overthrow of the Presidency, and one that might well do immense harm to the American system of government.<sup>25</sup>

Liberal newspapers across the country took note of Hartnett's editorial, some of them quoting long passages from it.<sup>26</sup> All of this was too much for the *Brooklyn Tablet*, which immediately assaulted *America*. It quoted "a number of prominent Jesuits" who said that the publication represented the thinking of only a "small number" within the order. One Jesuit even wrote the *Tablet*, "from the logic of the article it sounds as though Eleanor Roosevelt wrote it." The *Tablet* concluded that McCarthy was seeking "not to destroy the Presidency, but to save it from its enemies within the Government itself."<sup>27</sup> The national press also picked up the *Tablet's* rejoinder to *America*, thus making a national event out of a debate between two Catholic weeklies.<sup>28</sup> Never one to ignore an unfounded attack, Hartnett wrote an immediate reply to the *Tablet*, saying that there simply was no "official Jesuit position" on McCarthy, and that

24. *New York Times*, May 28, 1954, p. 1; and May 29, 1954, p. 1.

25. "'Peaceful Overthrow' of the U.S. Presidency," *America*, May 22, 1954, pp. 210-211.

26. The article went out over the Associated Press (AP) wires on May 18, 1954. (The May 22 issue of *America* appeared several days before the date shown on the magazine.) The AP article appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe*, May 18, 1954; in the *Washington Post*, May 18, 1954; in the *Baltimore Sun*, May 18, 1954, and in many other newspapers as well.

27. *Brooklyn Tablet*, May 21, 1954.

28. See for example, *Denver Post*, May 22, 1954; *Washington Post*, May 22, 1954; *New York Journal American*, May 22, 1954.

the Jesuit editors of the magazine were completely free to say whatever they believed was just and reasonable. Perhaps he grew defensive when he noted that the superiors of the order had chosen the editors because they believed them to have the "necessary qualifications" for this "difficult and specialized work."<sup>29</sup>

Hartnett's Jesuit enemies remained utterly unmoved by his arguments. Ready now to take the battle into the public arena, they wrote to both the *Brooklyn Tablet* and the *New York Journal-American* (a pro-McCarthy Hearst publication), expressing their bitter disagreement with *America*. The *Tablet* and the *Journal American* were only too happy to print the letters, since they were anxious to discredit the anti-McCarthy forces. One Jesuit from Wisconsin wrote that *America's* editors represented only a "minority opinion," and besides, only Jesuit superiors "speak officially for American Jesuits."<sup>30</sup>

While the battle of the Jesuits was appearing in the New York press, the Jesuit brethren were fighting it out in private as well. Some of the Jesuit communities in New York City disagreed so violently over *America* and McCarthy that they finally decided, quite on their own, not to discuss the subject any more. Meanwhile, the superior of the New York Jesuits, the Reverend John McMahon, was coming under increasing and severe pressure to discipline *America*. The most impassioned letters he received came, not surprisingly, from other New York Jesuits, who believed that the magazine's militant stand on McCarthy was bringing deep embarrassment to the order.<sup>31</sup> McMahon replied noncommittally to their pleas, as he did to similar missives from lay Catholics. (One layman even hinted that donations to the Jesuits might dry up if *America* did not change its tune.)<sup>32</sup>

As it happened, neither donations to the order nor complaints to *America* showed signs of diminishing. So many objections against the magazine came into Saint Patrick's Cathedral that it cancelled its subscription.<sup>33</sup> More serious than the cancellation at Saint Patrick's, however, were the violent and abusive telephone calls that inundated *America's* switchboard. For the first few days after the May 22 editorial,

29. "Freedom of Catholic Opinion," *America*, June 5, 1954, p. 261.

30. Rev. Robert H. Millmann to *Brooklyn Tablet* in *Tablet*, May 29, 1954; Rev. Patrick F. Hurley to *Tablet* in *Tablet*, May 29, 1954; Rev. J. A. Lennon to *New York Journal American* in *Journal*, May 29, 1954.

31. On agreement not to discuss McCarthy issue: interview with Thurston N. Davis, Feb. 21, 1972. Jesuit McCarthyites complain to their superior: Joseph McGowan to John McMahon, May 25, 1954, "McCarthy Editorial" folder, JAFU; McMahon to McGowan, May 25, 1954, *Ibid.*; Joseph A. Lennon to McMahon, May 25, 1954, *Ibid.*; John F. Hurley to McMahon, May 25, 1954, *Ibid.*; McMahon to Hurley, May 26, 1954, *Ibid.*

32. Daniel K. Shanley to McMahon, May 26, 1954, *Ibid.*

33. Bishop Joseph F. Flannelly to Hartnett, May 19, 1954, *Ibid.* Flannelly to McMahon, May 20, 1954, *Ibid.*; McMahon to Flannelly, May 21, 1954, *Ibid.*

the McCarthyites bombarded *America* with angry calls, so many of them coming in that the editors had to take turns answering them. "The same Irish voices kept calling," one of the assistant editors recalls.<sup>34</sup> And as always, irate readers mailed their furious thoughts to the magazine, some seventy "shocked" and "outraged" missives arriving immediately after the publication of the now-famous editorial.<sup>35</sup>

At the height of the uproar, someone shot a bullet through the door of Saint Ignatius Church, the Jesuit parish on Park Avenue in New York City. No one knows who shot the gun, or for what reason, but it was widely assumed that the May 22 editorial caused the incident.<sup>36</sup> So anxious had the the New York Jesuits become over the McCarthy crisis that they were ready to attribute even acts of violence to the McCarthyites.

It seemed that the furor over Hartnett's essay had begun to abate slightly when on May 29, *America's* superiors suddenly silenced the magazine on the topic of Senator McCarthy. Nothing could have come as more of a shock to Hartnett, since he knew that his superiors had long resisted pressures to silence the journal. What had happened? Though the superiors had refused to yield to the power tactics of the Catholic McCarthyites, they were deeply concerned that the McCarthy dispute had divided the nation's Jesuits. The founder of the order, Ignatius of Loyola, had repeatedly inveighed against public arguments between Jesuits, believing that unity in thought and action would be the key to the order's future success. Clearly the Jesuit debate over McCarthy had violated this rule. Nevertheless, *America* seemed to be breaking a long-standing command not to engage in "disputes among Catholics," a directive that went back to the founding of the periodical some fifty years before and that was still in effect. Finally, *America's* superiors believed that in its zeal to pursue the McCarthy question, it had neglected other issues "which are hardly less important than the Army-McCarthy case." On May 29, 1954, the magazine's superiors directed it to drop the McCarthy issue, and to keep their directive strictly secret.<sup>37</sup>

Hartnett immediately protested the decision, as the Jesuit rule allowed

34. Interview with Thurston N. Davis, February 21, 1972.

35. Hartnett wrote that the magazine had received 70 letters for McCarthy and about six for *America*. See Hartnett to Parsons, May 21, 1954, Parsons Papers, GU.

36. Davis interview.

37. John McMahon, William E. Fitzgerald, and William F. Maloney to Hartnett, May 29, 1954, "McCarthy Editorial" folder, JAFU. In a covering letter, McMahon wrote Hartnett, "We do not wish you to interpret this Directive as a vote of no confidence. It is not that. You still have our support. But in the present heated state of public opinion, particularly among Catholics, we think silence for two months will be golden. . . . P.S. If some extraordinary and crucial situation should develop which you and the Staff think should warrant an editorial or comment, you may represent this to me and I shall take it up with the Committee." McMahon to Hartnett, May 29, 1954, *Ibid.*

him to do. He argued not only that it would be impossible to keep the order a secret for long, but that it violated the principle of freedom of expression, one which he believed to be of paramount importance both to the magazine and to the Roman Catholic Church in America. If *America* were allowed to continue speaking its mind on McCarthy, everyone would see that the Church believed in open debate and freedom of thought. If *America* had achieved any success at all, it was because of the large measure of editorial freedom that it had always enjoyed, a freedom that the directive might destroy entirely.<sup>38</sup>

Impressed by Hartnett's pleas, the superiors modified their earlier order. They would now allow *America's* editors to write about McCarthy, provided that they acted as "censors" for each other, and that they avoided the subject unless the "good of the Church" clearly required it.<sup>39</sup> Hartnett agreed fully with the revised order, and accepted it "with gratitude."<sup>40</sup>

The problem would undoubtedly have ended at that point, if the Father General of the Jesuits in Rome had not intervened. Father John Baptist Janssens, S. J., had been following the *America*-McCarthy dispute with intense interest, and in June, 1954, he issued a series of commands to *America's* superiors in the United States, ordering them to take a hard line on the magazine. He was "deeply grieved," he wrote, that Jesuits in the United States had taken to the "public press" to express their disagreement with *America*, and had done so with obvious bitterness. Yet if one examined the problem carefully, he said, one saw that the underlying cause of all the difficulty was the magazine itself, which plainly had violated the rule laid down in its charter not to engage in "bitter disputes among Catholics." Concluded Janssens emphatically: "I cannot fail to think that the Fathers Provincial [superiors], especially those assigned to the direction of the magazine, have failed somehow in their duty. Therefore let the Fathers Provincial see to it that the Editor withdraws himself from this dispute immediately."<sup>41</sup>

In a later communication he expanded further on what seemed to bother him most of all, namely Hartnett's belief that the magazine ought to have complete freedom of expression. To Janssens, this was errant nonsense: every Jesuit should understand that the order "gives no one a freedom to write which is not subject to strict censorship."<sup>42</sup> With the McCarthy question settled by Rome, the Jesuit superiors relayed Janssens' unyielding order to Hartnett, who accepted it quietly and with

38. Hartnett to Vincent McCormick, May 31, 1954, "America" box, JAFU; Hartnett to McMahon, June 2, 1954, Ibid.

39. McMahon, Maloney, Fitzgerald, to Editors of *America*, June 3, 1954, Ibid.

40. Hartnett to McMahon, June 4, 1954, Ibid.

41. John B. Janssens to John McMahon, June 2, 1954, "America" box, JAFU.

42. Janssens to McMahon, June 17, 1954, "America" box, JAFU.

grace.<sup>43</sup> *America* said nothing more about McCarthy until his death in 1957, when it noted the Senator's demise almost in passing.<sup>44</sup>

Drained from the long battle with the McCarthyites and thoroughly "sick of the thing," as he said of the McCarthy affair, Hartnett took a long vacation. In September of 1955 he retired from the editorship of *America*.<sup>45</sup> Rumors still persist that his superiors "fired" him from his post because of the McCarthy episode, but no documentary evidence exists to prove this. On the contrary, the voluminous evidence in the Jesuit archives of New York shows that Hartnett retired because he was worn out, tired of the job, and believed that the magazine needed a new man at the helm.<sup>46</sup>

In looking back at the episode (one so painful that the editors of *America* still wince when talking about it), it seems clear that Janssens overreacted. The furor over the editorial had begun to subside, Hartnett was ready to devote less space to the McCarthy issue, and local superiors clearly had the situation well under control. Janssens' intervention therefore was precipitous, blunt, and peremptory. Fearful both of innovations in the Church and of Jesuit involvement in controversy, he worked tirelessly to form a body of Jesuits who asked no questions and did what they were told. One of the casualties of this approach was *America*, whose anti-McCarthy policy came to an abrupt and highly mysterious end. By contrast to Janssens, the magazine's superiors in the United States had acted with flexibility, tolerance, and obvious respect for intellectual freedom. Under intense pressure to silence the magazine, they had merely asked for moderation in the face of an issue of immense dispute. The pity is that they did not get the chance to let *America* pursue it to the end.

The American Jesuits divided decisively over Joe McCarthy. Not only did they disagree over *America's* editorials on McCarthy, but Jesuits across the country took opposing viewpoints on the Senator. On the east coast, such venerable Jesuit institutions as Georgetown and Fordham Universities found Jesuits on both sides of the issue, while on the west coast the Universities of Santa Clara and San Francisco also numbered Jesuit adherents to both causes. The same was true of Marquette University, the Senator's alma mater. Quite plainly Joe McCarthy and his "ism" represented two different political commitments, which, when taken to extremes, amounted to a contradiction. The McCarthy phalanx

43. Fitzgerald, Maloney, and McMahon to Hartnett, June 23, 1954, *Ibid.*; Hartnett to Thomas E. Henneberry, June 27, 1954, *Ibid.*; Henneberry to Hartnett, July 3, 1954, *Ibid.*

44. "The Passing of Senator McCarthy," *America*, May 18, 1957, p. 223.

45. Hartnett to Wilfred Parsons, September, 30, 1954, Parsons Papers, GU. On September 17, 1955, Thurston N. Davis took over as the new editor of *America*.

46. On Hartnett's personal reasons for leaving: author's interview with Hartnett, September 9, 1971. For documentary evidence, see "America" boxes, JAFU.

adhered to public displays of patriotism, took a dim view of the liberal legislation that had characterized the Truman and Roosevelt Administrations, and supported an all-out hunt for Communist subversives (while worrying little about possible incursions into civil liberties). The Jesuit McCarthyites, in sum, subscribed to the principles of conservative Republicanism, a political philosophy they found exemplified not only in Joe McCarthy, but in William F. Knowland, John Foster Dulles, and Robert A. Taft as well. All this had little to do with religion, though the conservative Jesuits would occasionally cite the Church's anti-Communist teachings for support, or they would sometimes point to the "sufferings of the Church behind the Iron Curtain" as an example of the consequences of Communism. On the issue of domestic Communism, however, they more often invoked the rhetoric of conservative American politics than the Church's teachings against Marxism.

In the case of the liberal American Jesuits who opposed McCarthy, the story was the same: their political views formed their positions on McCarthy. The anti-McCarthy forces adhered to the Roosevelt-Truman-Stevenson social programs, and to the Democratic party's theory on the problem of Communist subversion. That is to say, they favored a rigorous search for spies, but emphasized the need for preserving civil liberties as well. Strident displays of patriotism left them cold, as did the conservative notion that intellectuals and academics were somehow "eggheads," unpatriotic, and given to "softness on Communism." The Jesuits who subscribed to these tenets read not only the *Commonweal* and *America*, but the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* as well. Though sympathetic to the editorial policies of the *Nation*, they tended to give that liberal journal a wide berth, since it supported Paul Blanshard (in their view a notorious Catholic-baiter) and in addition, opposed government assistance to parochial schools.

The Jesuit view of McCarthy differed little from that of other American Catholics, or even of the nation as a whole. The country's bitter split over McCarthy followed roughly political lines, in which liberals were ranged against McCarthy and conservatives took his side, and this division was reflected among lay Catholics as well.<sup>47</sup>

What was peculiar about Jesuit participation in the controversy was the *public* position of the order within the Church. Americans seemed to think that Jesuits "spoke for" or somehow "officially represented" the views of the whole Church. Perhaps they thought this because the order was the largest one in the Church, or because it was the one that received the most publicity, or the one that seemed closest to the Pope. Dubbed by slick journalists "the Pope's Marines" or "the Church's finest," the Jesuits in America found themselves in a tight spot: they were expected to say

47. Crosby, "The Angry Catholics."

whatever people wanted to hear them say. Thus the McCarthyites (and McCarthy himself) expected them to uphold the Senator, while political liberals demanded precisely the opposite. Catholic conservatives (symbolized by the Jesuit general in Rome) assumed that they would adhere willingly to rigid canons of censorship, while civil liberations such as Robert Hartnett favored the contrary doctrine of editorial freedom. American conservatives of every shade expected them to give unquestioning support to any kind of Communist hunt at all, while American liberals insisted that they choose carefully between authentic and bogus spy probes. With such contradictory demands placed upon them, it is no wonder that so few disappointed so many.

In fact America's Jesuits, like America's Catholic in general, had arrived at an advanced state of pluralism. They seemed light years removed from the Church of colonial times, or even from the era of religious strife that had marked the decade of the twenties. If the Catholic ghetto had not disappeared, it had at least weakened its hold on Catholics as they fled the city for the suburbs, seeking respectability, affluence, and higher status.

The comforting assurance that they were well on the way to full Americanization came to them not only from the Rotary Club and the Elks, but from such leading oracles of American civil religion as Dwight David Eisenhower, who seemed to think that one religion was as good as another, provided only that it supported America.<sup>48</sup>

With the march to the suburbs came the development of an all-pervasive national creed, the "American Way of Life," to which Jesuits were expected to conform along with the rest of the nation. To some Jesuits, the American Way of Life undoubtedly looked like the golden path to the Promised Land, offering as it did a new certificate of acceptance, a sure guarantee that Catholics were no different from anyone else. To others, however, the American Way of Life was something much less alluring: what if accepting the creed meant accepting Joe McCarthy, and all his pomps and works? Or what if it implied just the opposite, for instance the endorsement of Adlai Stevenson? America's Jesuits, in sum, found themselves on the horns of a dilemma: if full Americanization meant abandonment of one's freedom as well as capitulation to a mindless nationalism, was Americanization really a benefit? The McCarthy debate did nothing to solve the dilemma, but only made it more intense.

48. *New York Times*, December 23, 1952.